



**University of  
Zurich**<sup>UZH</sup>

**Zurich Open Repository and  
Archive**

University of Zurich  
University Library  
Strickhofstrasse 39  
CH-8057 Zurich  
[www.zora.uzh.ch](http://www.zora.uzh.ch)

---

Year: 1993

---

**Learning Strategies for closely related languages: on the Italian spoken by  
Spanish immigrants in Switzerland**

Schmid, Stephan

Posted at the Zurich Open Repository and Archive, University of Zurich  
ZORA URL: <https://doi.org/10.5167/uzh-112598>  
Book Section

Originally published at:  
Schmid, Stephan (1993). Learning Strategies for closely related languages: on the Italian spoken by Spanish immigrants in Switzerland. In: Kettemann, Bernhard; Wieden, Wilfried. Current Issues in European Second Language Acquisition Research. Tübingen: s.n., 405-418.

## Contents

Preface .....	XIII
---------------	------

### 1. Theoretical and General Aspects

Cook, Vivian J.	Wholistic multi-competence - jeu d'esprit or paradigm shift? .....	3
Singh, Rajendra	Reflections on interlanguage: Some remarks on interlanguage and linguistic theory .....	9
Lalleman, Josine A.	A functional approach to markedness: Possible uses in the description and explanation of features in the Dutch of advanced second language learners .....	29
Ringbom, Håkan	At what point of time does transfer actually occur? .....	47
Mägiste, Edith	More brain activity in bilinguals? .....	53
Kettemann, Bernhard	On the construction of (morphonological) knowledge .....	59

### 2. Phonetics and Phonology

Bohn, Ocke-Schwen	Interactions between new and similar vowels in L2 speech development .....	71
Grosser, Wolfgang	Aspects of intonational L2 acquisition .....	81
Nemser, William	The vocalic repertoires of two Austrian learners of English .....	95
Young-Scholten, Martha	The L2 acquisition of informal speech in German ...	111
Wieden, Wilfried	Aspects of acquisitional stages .....	125

### 3. Morphology, Syntax and Semantics

Dewaele, Jean-Marc	Variation in the morphosyntactic and lexical systems of French-based interlanguages .....	139
Georgieva, Maria	A cognitive approach to the acquisition of English modals by Bulgarian learners .....	151

## LEARNING STRATEGIES FOR CLOSELY RELATED LANGUAGES: ON THE ITALIAN SPOKEN BY SPANISH IMMIGRANTS IN SWITZERLAND

Stephan Schmid

This paper deals with Italian as a second language of Spanish immigrant workers in German speaking Switzerland. After illustrating the sociolinguistic background of these interlanguages, I shall briefly discuss the notion of 'learning strategy'. In the main body of the paper, a model of three strategies for learning cognate languages (congruence, correspondence, difference) is proposed, seeking to demonstrate how these strategies interrelate with the inherent properties of the languages involved in the learning process.

One of the major trends in second language acquisition research over the last ten years or so has been a renewed interest in the role of the mother tongue (see e.g. Gass/Selinker 1983, Kellerman/Sharwood Smith 1986, Ringbom 1987) as a reaction to the shortcomings apparent particularly in the L1=L2 hypothesis and, to some degree, also in the 'natural route of development' approach. Some of the claims of traditional contrastive analysis have been reaffirmed, such as the relevance of typological relatedness between native and target language, in that the degree of similarity between first and second language items will have a significant impact on the learner's task. The crucial notion of 'transfer', however, has been interpreted in a quite different way: the behaviourist conception of transfer has been abandoned in favour of a more cognitivist view of the influence of the first language on second language learning. In such a framework, the notion of 'learning strategy' plays a central role, and the creative aspect of the language learning process is emphasized along with the main assumptions about the nature of interlanguages, i.e. their dynamic, variable and developmentally orientated character.

### 1. Italian as a 'lingua franca' among immigrant workers in German speaking Switzerland

Sociolinguistic research on the language of Italian immigrant workers in Switzerland has, since the early seventies, pointed out that the Italian language is employed in communicative interaction among immigrants from different areas and sometimes also between the Swiss population and immigrants (Rovere 1974:103-104). This 'lingua franca' seems to be most widespread in those occupational domains which have a majority of foreign workers, such as building, the textile industry and gastronomy, but it is now also commonly used for informal contact in the neighbourhood and in shops. This phenomenon is due mainly to the particular socio-



economic position of Italian immigrants within the working class of Switzerland: Italians constitute the largest ethnic group among foreign workers, and also have the longest tradition of migration; moreover, the fact that Italian is an official language of Switzerland may have favoured the willingness of the German-speaking population to accommodate to this particular immigrant language.

Other foreign workers with a Romance language, i.e. Spaniards and Portuguese, play a crucial role in the diffusion of the Italian 'lingua franca': usually these immigrants first learn Italian, and only afterwards German or Swiss German. This choice is determined in part by structural closeness, which facilitates the learning of the cognate language, but socio-psychological factors also come into play, such as the similar cultural backgrounds of these nations, and a refusal to assimilate into the dominant group of the host society by using its language. Speaking Italian, therefore, means displaying one's identity as a foreign worker, opposed to the values and customs of Swiss society, and helps to create a feeling of solidarity among immigrants. It should also be noted that in this way, non-native speakers of Italian, mainly Spaniards and Portuguese, themselves produce input for other immigrants such as Turks, Yugoslavs or Greeks, a phenomenon which makes the situation we are discussing similar to the genesis of a pidgin (Berruto 1991).

The interlanguages of Spanish speaking immigrants are located in the middle of a continuum. At the target language end we find the substandard varieties spoken by the majority of the Italians living in Switzerland; at the basilect end there are the learner varieties of foreign workers with a non-Romance first language, which often display strong simplification features such as the reduction of inflectional paradigms, article deletion, or the generalisation of the infinitive and the past participle. Many of these features resemble the learner varieties of recent immigrants in Italy, at least with regard to syntax and verbal morphology, and may, therefore, in some way sketch out the 'natural route' for approaching Italian as a second language.<sup>1</sup> However, most of the Italian interlanguages in Switzerland become fossilized rather early along the continuum, owing to the rather limited communicative functions of the 'lingua franca'. One could even speak of a 'norm' of *Fremdarbeiteritalienisch*, which on the one hand retains some linguistic features of the foreigner talk input

provided by Italians, and on the other hand has created a number of autonomous and typically developmental structures.<sup>2</sup>

The Italian of Spanish immigrants differs greatly from this basilectal type of interlanguage; even learners at an initial stage can be seen to have at their disposal a considerably more complex morphological system, normally using correct verb and noun forms. These varieties are mainly characterized by a high degree of language mixing, both in the form of alternating Spanish and Italian constituents within the same utterance, i.e. by intra-sentential codeswitching (see examples 1 and 2), and in the creation of lexical hybrids, for instance with a Spanish base and an Italian suffix as in 3), or vice-versa as in 4):<sup>3</sup>

- 1) *Yo me he criado sempre* con la mia mamma (2: 47)  
"I have always grown up with my mummy"
- 2) *Un lavoro como profesor de pianoforte* (9: 72)  
"A job as a piano teacher"
- 3) *Cosetfe* (7: 439); *serebbe* (8: 404)  
"harvest" f.pl. "be" 3. cond.
- 4) *amigos* (2: 115); *avía* (1: 20)  
"friend" m.pl. "have" 1. impf.

In our case, the notion of 'interlanguage' can indeed be interpreted in its true etymological sense, i.e. as a variety which somehow stands between the first and the second language (Corder 1978). This view is also supported by the fact that learners tend continuously to reduce their language mixing during the process of approximation to the target language. Their varieties usually become fossilized at a certain point along the interlanguage continuum, depending on the amount and the nature of Italian input they are exposed to. The intensity of their contact with the social network of the Italian community varies a lot, ranging from watching television and occasional conversations at work, to mixed marriages. Some speakers, however, achieve a degree of linguistic competence close to the Italian substandard variety, the so-called *italiano popolare*, which is hence native-like.

<sup>1</sup> See Giacalone Ramat 1988, Bernini/Giacalone Ramat 1990, Banfi/Giacalone Ramat 1990. Note, however, that most of these immigrants come from developing countries like Ethiopia, the Philippines or China. The fact that their mother tongues thus differ considerably from a typological point of view accounts for the common 'low starting point' in the acquisition of the new language.

<sup>2</sup> The latter obviously recall the pidginization hypothesis; see Berruto/Moretti/Schmid 1990 and Berruto 1991 for different types of evidence. Berruto (forthcoming) analyzes some of the characteristics of Italian foreigner talk. A good example here is the overgeneralisation of the infinitive as an unmarked form, which occurs in foreigner talk and in the Italian 'lingua franca' in Switzerland, but not in learner varieties in Italy, where this form seems to express particular modal values (Berretta 1990b).

<sup>3</sup> Spanish elements are indicated by italics, while the numbers between brackets refer to speakers and lines in the transcription. The data I deal with belong to a corpus of approx. 100 narrative interviews with immigrants from different areas, collected within the research project "The Italian language in German-speaking Switzerland" (Swiss National Research Foundation no. 1.542-0.87).



## 2. Learning Strategies

According to the new cognitivist perspective on language learning, the role of the mother tongue can be recast in terms of 'learning strategy', and some authors even tend to consider transfer or interference itself as a 'strategy' (Kellerman 1977, Ellis 1985:37-38). However, there seems to be little agreement in the literature on the number and the types of strategies. Even if we take for granted the distinction between the three main types of learner strategies - i.e. learning strategies, production strategies and communication strategies<sup>4</sup> - we still find a considerable proliferation of terminology referring to learning strategies (Ellis 1985:167-175, Larsen Freeman/Long 1991:199-203).

Current proposals range from psychologically-based strategies such as 'pattern memorization', 'pattern imitation' and 'pattern analysis' on the one hand, to more interlanguage-orientated strategies like 'simplification' and 'inferencing' on the other; moreover, specific strategies concerning the structures and rules of the learner variety like 'overgeneralisation', 'regularizing' and 'redundancy reducing' have been postulated. Some linguists have also referred to 'lexical' or 'morphological' strategies, stressing the fact that learners may adopt divergent solutions for the same task, in that they rely on different modules of the language system (Berretta 1990a, Moretti 1990).<sup>5</sup>

The conceptions of what constitutes a learning strategy also vary considerably, if one confronts Rubin's (1975:43) quite simple definition - "the techniques or devices which a learner may use to acquire knowledge" - with the rather sophisticated model of 'cognitive' and 'metacognitive' learning strategies presented by O' Malley et al. (1985; cf. also Larsen Freeman/Long 1991:201-203). The employment of different learning strategies probably depends upon all the variables that affect second language learning, such as the learner's proficiency in L2, age, motivation, cognitive style, cultural differences etc. I suggest that in this regard the learning context (classroom foreign language teaching or 'naturalistic' second language learning) plays a central role; moreover, the learner's perception of the difference or similarity between the native and the target language may have a decisive impact on the formation of learning strategies.

In my view, a learning strategy can be seen as a particular procedure for formulating hypotheses about the structure of the target language and for establishing interlanguage rules on the basis of these hypotheses. Learners form hypotheses by

<sup>4</sup> Note that this division is itself a matter of discussion; cf. Ellis 1985:188.

<sup>5</sup> This list of possible learning strategies does not claim to be exhaustive; many similar or slightly different models can be found in the literature. See, for example, Kielhöfer's and Börner's (1979:120-137) strategies of 'imitation', 'symmetry formation' and 'probability', or Meisel's (1983) 'elaborative' vs. 'restrictive simplification'.

relying on prior linguistic knowledge (of the L1, L2 or other languages) or by inducing new rules from the input (or even combining these two methods); thus, it is legitimate to assume the existence of L1-based learning strategies. Since the concepts of 'transfer' and 'interference' seem to me too wide to deal with cross-linguistic influence, I shall propose a more detailed model containing three main strategies applying to the learning process in the case of cognate languages.

## 3. Three main learning strategies

If, during the process of interlanguage creation, learners use their knowledge of their first language, they are faced with three basic tasks. These tasks can be stated in the imperative form, by analogy with Slobin's (1973) 'operating principles':

- 5) 1. Discover those elements and structures which are identical in both languages.
2. Discover procedures for relating items and rules of L1 to items and rules of L2, or vice versa.
3. Discover those elements and structures where the target language differs from the native language.

Out of these fundamental tasks learners develop different ways of creating hypotheses about the structure of the target language. Faced with any item on the phonological, morphosyntactic or lexical level, they have to establish whether the forms or rules of L1 and L2 are congruent, whether they are different, or whether there is a sort of correspondence between the first and the second language. In other words, they use three different learning strategies, which I propose to call the strategies of congruence, correspondence and difference.

This typology of learning strategies is not based on any particular psycholinguistic framework, but has been established in a rather inductive way out of the analysis of L2 production. Since learning processes cannot be observed, we can only try to infer how they work from error analysis (Ellis 1985:14). In the way the three strategies are postulated, they are actually second generation hypotheses, in that they represent the linguist's hypotheses about the learner's hypotheses about the target language. Although this model appears to be trivial to some extent, it is not without its theoretical implications. The basic cognitive operation underlying the three strategies is comparison, which serves not only as a fundamental tool in human cognition, but also as an organizing principle of semiotic systems and therefore also of natural languages (Langacker 1987:101). Moreover, learning theory teaches us that the acquisition of new knowledge always takes place by relating new information to previous knowledge.

In the case of second language learning, this knowledge can be of either the L1 or the L2; in fact, as the learner's proficiency in the target language increases, we note a certain shift from the strategy of congruence to the strategies of correspondence



and difference. One of the learner's tasks is precisely to modify his reliance on the different strategies continuously by hypothesis testing, and to reorganize the interlanguage grammar: an L2 item turns out to be different from that in the L1, so the strategy of congruence has to be abandoned for this item; a particular rule formed on the grounds of the correspondence strategy may be blocked by new restrictions etc. It is safe to assume that these learning processes are mostly unconscious.

The model which I now propose to present in more detail does not lead to a discrete classification of learner's errors; overlapping is possible, due to the rather prototypical character of the strategies. Not all strategies apply to the same degree to the different linguistic levels: congruence may be more productive in phonology, while difference is mainly suited to the lexicon. The same linguistic phenomenon even can be interpreted as an actualization of two different strategies working in different modules of the linguistic system. Note that the strategies of congruence, correspondence and difference have been individuated to analyze the learning processes in the case of cognate languages; they do not constitute a generalizable model for all learning situations, nor do they represent an exhaustive list of learning strategies. At any rate, this model seems to fit in well with some of the central issues in second language acquisition theory: variability and back-sliding can be interpreted as competition or shifts between these strategies; a particular cognitive style may favour one strategy above the others, etc.

**3.1. Congruence.** The strategy of congruence leads the learner to suppose that the particular item of the target language he focuses on is identical to an analogous item in his native language. He has good reason to do so, since in fact many elements are congruent even from the linguist's point of view. If the learner uses the congruent features correctly in his interlanguage, we may suppose (although it is difficult to prove) that the strategy of congruence has been adopted:<sup>6</sup>

6) CONG 1: L1 and L2 are congruent with regard to a particular element of the language system. No error can be found in L2 production.

On the other hand, especially at the beginning of the learning process, learners tend to overestimate the power of the congruence strategy by 'importing' into the target language extraneous elements from their L1:

7) CONG 2: The interlanguage contains elements of L1 which do not exist in L2.

<sup>6</sup> Since mental processes are not observable, but can only be inferred from the data, the different subtypes of learning strategies will be described in terms of their products. However, there is no doubt that especially in the case of so-called 'positive transfer', the methodological weakness of error analysis raises serious problems for second language acquisition theory (Ringbom 1987:58).

On the phonological level, we find very few realisations of typical Spanish phonemes like /θ/ or /x/. In any case, phonemic transfer is not systematic, but rather obeys rather a sort of 'lexical triggering', i.e. the occurrence of such phones can be ascribed to borrowing, as in the following examples:

- |    |                  |                       |
|----|------------------|-----------------------|
| 8) | ['xente] (1:264) | [dieθi'seis] (1: 364) |
|    | "people"         | "sixteen"             |

More frequent are applications of Spanish allophonic rules which are not shared by the phonology of Italian, such as the spirantisation of voiced intervocalic obstruents, namely /d/ → [ð] / V\_V and /b/ → [β] / V\_V:

- |    |                     |                  |
|----|---------------------|------------------|
| 9) | ['raðio] (13: 769); | ['daβa] (11: 48) |
|    | "radio"             | "gave"           |

In the second example, the Spanish neutralization of /v/ and /b/ is also involved. Some of these allophonic processes even reflect diatopic variation in Iberoromance, such as the neutralized *schwa* in a Catalan speaker (10) or the assimilation of /s/ to a following velar consonant, typical of the Andalusian variety of Spanish (11):

- |     |  |
|-----|--|
| 10) | ['pisə] (1: 82; referring to the town of Pisa) |
| 11) | [te'deçko] (7: 303)                            |
|     | "German"                                       |

Probably the best-known phonological rule of Spanish is a restriction on syllable structure which generates an epenthetic /e/ in word initial position, if /s/ is followed by another consonant (Ø → e/#\_sC; Hyman 1975: 163):

- |     |                            |                   |
|-----|----------------------------|-------------------|
| 12) | compagni esviseri (7: 242) | lo stesso (5:328) |
|     | "Swiss colleagues"         | "the same"        |

Thus, as far as interlanguage phonology is concerned, learners often go too far in their reliance on the congruence strategy and form too strong hypotheses about the nature of the phonological rules of the target language.

It is possible, in cognate languages, also to transfer grammatical morphemes from the first to the second language, as we have already seen in example 4). A typical case is plural formation:

- |     |                          |                           |
|-----|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| 13) | bastanza parolas (1: 52) | tutos los + capos (2:139) |
|     | "some words"             | "all the + chiefs"        |

Spanish plural formation is undoubtedly more iconic and transparent (and thus easier to process) than Italian because it simply adds an -s suffix to both the feminine and the masculine singular, whereas in Italian the singular morphemes -a/-o are replaced by -e/-i (*parole/capi*); thus, the Italian plural formation rule might be difficult to learn, because it is not internally motivated and because substitution is a more complex operation than mere addition. However, this and analogous phenomena in verb inflection are limited to the initial stage of the learning process or to early fossilized interlanguages.

The fact that Spanish phonological and morphological rules are applied to Italian lexemes suggests that lexical differences are perceived more easily than differences in the other modules of the language system. Thus even in interlanguages with a



much more advanced 'starting point', learners first seem to acquire those new items which need to be stored, and only afterwards the processing mechanisms of the L2. Nevertheless, the congruence strategy may also lead to failure in the lexical domain; at least, the Italian interlanguages of Spaniards show a considerable number of 'borrowings':

- 14) C'è una ragazza eh + seduta *en un banco* ee ascoltando la musica con un *rradiocassé* + e c'è un *perro* (2:769)  
 "There is a girl ahm + sitting on a bench and listening to the music with a transistor radio + and there is a dog"

- 15) *Entonse lui me explicaba si era una parola* (5: 351)  
 "So he explained to me if it was a word"

Given the great number of identical word-forms in the two languages, congruence is indeed a successful strategy for many lexical items; 'borrowability' depends on the perception of the relationship between first and second language (Kellerman 1977). The congruence strategy, however, may fail with rare words, where communicative pressure leads to a sort of *ad hoc* borrowing; borrowing has been referred to as a communicative strategy (Corder 1983:92), but in cases such as 14) and 15) I would nevertheless consider it a manifestation of this particular learning strategy. I assume that speakers are not aware that the chosen lexeme does not exist in the second language, since no tell-tale hesitation appears in the utterance. This means that borrowing as a product is the result of a false learner hypothesis about the lexicon of the target language.

Nevertheless, the strategy of congruence does not always result in the transfer of an extraneous item into the second language; sometimes it works in a more subtle way by using elements of the L2 according to their distribution in the native language. This third type of congruence strategy can be stated in the following terms:

- 16) CONG 3: The interlanguage has an element X instead of an element Y. X and Y exist in both L1 and L2 and are congruent in form, but have different functions.

Weinreich's (1953) 'lexical interference' is probably the most obvious phenomenon of this kind: similarity in the phonological form leads the learner to the hypothesis that there may be complete semantic congruence as well. One speaker uses, for example, the Italian word *abitazione* "house, apartment" in the sense of Spanish *habitación* "room" (6: 147).<sup>7</sup>

A typical inflectional feature of the Italian interlanguages of Spaniards is the first person singular of the imperfect tense, which ends in -o in Italian, but in -a in Spanish (like the third person). Most of the speakers under consideration use forms like *parlava*, *aveva* and *lavorava* when referring to themselves, since the situational

context rules out any possible reference to another person. It seems that in morphology the strategy of congruence is generally favoured when it leads to the simplification of inflectional paradigms and thus implies a reduction of the learner's burden with regard either to storage or to processing.

3.2. *Correspondence*. As the learner perceives the great degree of similarity between the target language and his mother tongue, he will try to recognize some regularities in order to facilitate the comprehension of unknown items on the one hand, and to acquire the ability to form new items himself on the other. I propose to subsume mental activities of this kind under the learning strategy of correspondence. This is probably the most dynamic and creative area of interlanguage, where much more processing than storage is involved. The strategy of correspondence lies somewhere between the other two strategies, in that learners perceive a difference between the features of the two languages, but are nevertheless able to handle this type of L2 input on the basis of their knowledge of their first language. The direction of this correspondence can run either from L2 to L1, or vice versa, so that again we have to distinguish two different subtypes for this strategy.

The learner not only has to limit the range of the congruence strategy by suppressing elements of his native language which do not exist in the L2, but he or she also has to learn new features of the target language. Possibly this is an even more difficult task, and so he or she may be tempted to relate an unknown item of the second language to a similar one in the first language:

- 17) CORR 1: An element X of L2 which does not exist in L1 is perceived and represented in the interlanguage system as an element Y common to L1 and L2.

This is a fairly common phenomenon with regard to phonemic representations. The Italian dental affricate /ts/ is often realized by the homorganic fricative /s/ as in 18), whereas the Italian palatal fricative /ʃ/ is represented either by the dental fricative /s/ or by the homorganic affricate /tʃ/ (cf. 19); again, the Italian voiced palatal affricate /dʒ/ undergoes devoicing (20):

- 18) [ra'gasa], [t'asa], [emigra'sjone]  
 19) [ca'pise]; [t'petʃe], [impe'ditʃe]  
 20) [pasa'tʃero], [re'tʃone]

In inflection, this type of correspondence works in a very similar way to the 'weak' form of the congruence strategy, resulting mainly in a reduction of allomorphy. Faced with the competing stems of the Italian modal verb *dovere*, *dov-* and *dev-*, a Spaniard easily overgeneralizes *dev-*, thus producing forms like \**deveva* (8: 176), because of the corresponding Spanish *deber* which lacks stem allomorphy. Again, Italian has three phonologically determined allomorphs for the singular masculine definite article, *il libro*, *lo zio* and *l'amico*, whereas Spanish only has *el*:

<sup>7</sup> In the case of CONG 3, we deal mostly with similarity, not with complete congruence of form.



therefore learners tend to employ the corresponding *il*-form in all cases: \**il albero*, \**il uomo* (3: 408, 377).<sup>8</sup>

Conversely, learners sometimes overgeneralize their observations of similarities between the two languages and form too strong hypotheses about the 'rule-governedness' of these correspondences. In this case, the learner starts from an element of his or her first language and tries to transform it, by the application of a 'correspondence rule', into a second language item. Most of these processes are very simple and very productive; the Italian infinitive, for instance, is obtained by the mere addition of a final *-e* to the corresponding Spanish form: sp. *dormir* "sleep" -> it. *dormire*.

21) CORR 2: An element X of L1 is transformed into an element Y of L2 by means of a correspondence rule.

Acquiring a knowledge of such regularities reduces the burden of learning, in that much storage can be avoided by processing. That mental processes of this kind are not mere conjecture on the part of the linguist can be detected in the overgeneralisation of such correspondence rules.

There are a number of corresponding lexemes where Spanish has an interdental fricative /θ/ and Italian a palatal affricate /tʃ/ in the same position; thus Spanish /'θena/ "dinner" and /'kaθa/ "hunting" sound in Italian like /'tʃena/ and /'katʃa/. It is natural for the learner to represent this perceived similarity in his or her interlanguage by formulating a hypothesis /θ/ -> /tʃ/. However, this rule is not universally applicable and therefore we find overgeneralisations like ['tʃero] and [ga'litʃia] instead of ['dzero] and [ga'litsia]. A similar correspondence exists between the Spanish diphthong *-ue-* and Italian *-o-* in word pairs like *puente/ponte* "bridge" or *muerte/morte* "death". However the rule *-ue-* -> *-o-* only holds for closed syllables, whereas learners tend also to apply it to open syllables; thus, we find forms like \**bona*, \**omo* and \**scola/escola*.

Learners at the initial stage or with an early fossilized interlanguage perceive the differences on the lexical level, but guess that congruence holds for the grammatical morphemes. More advanced learners rather go in the opposite direction, since they have acquired the morphological rules of the second language, but sometimes overestimate the possibilities of the congruence strategy on the lexical level: the past participles \**parato* "unemployed" and \**regressato* "returned" are well formed according to Italian inflection, but contain a lexical base which is meaningless for a native Italian.

Similar mixtures occur within the lexical bases, where learners apply phonological transformation rules like monophthongation or diphthongation to Spanish lexemes in order to 'Italianize' them. This strategy fails when the target language requires additional phonological changes or simply uses a different lexical item. Examples are *fuera* "outside" -> \**fora* or *cartera* "bag" -> \**cartiera*; the Italian equivalents should be *fuori* and *borsa*. The underlying principle in the formation of the learner's 'potential vocabulary' is, of course, analogy (Ringbom 1987:62).

3.3. *Difference*. In communicative interaction, learners not only try to understand what L2 utterances mean, but as a by-product they also recognize some patterns of the target language; thus, in comprehension some kind of analysis is involved. In the same way as they discover congruent elements of the first and the second language or establish relations of correspondence between L1 and L2 items, learners, of course, also notice the existence of differences. The degree to which the learner's hypotheses ascribe such differences to the target language vary considerably. However, adopting the learning strategy of difference does not always mean choosing the correct solution. Initial learners in particular tend to overestimate the range of differences and fall behind the 'common' starting point:

22) DIFF 1: The interlanguage contains features of linguistic simplification with respect to both L1 and L2.<sup>9</sup>

In initial or fossilized learner varieties, we find several basilectal features which resemble the interlanguages of learners whose mother tongue is typologically more distant from Italian, such as the lack of concord in noun phrases or the omission of articles and auxiliaries:

- 23) Tre settimane (9: 219)  
"three week"
- 24) Anche cane le prende (14: 160)  
"also dog takes him"
- 25) Yo arrivato (2: 72)  
"I arriv" - past participle

It is not clear, however, whether these features are the result of a sort of natural acquisitional process, in the sense of Andersen's (1983a) 'nativization', or if they reflect simplified input either from native speakers in the form of foreigner talk or from non-native speakers in the form of fossilized interlanguages, the so-called 'lingua franca'. In fact, the speech of some of the speakers studied displays patterns

<sup>8</sup> Initial learners even use Spanish *el* according to the congruence strategy: *el tedesco*, *el italiano* (2:118, 162); for a more detailed analysis of the article paradigm in the Italian interlanguages of Spaniards, see Berruto/Moretti/Schmid 1990:221-224.

<sup>9</sup> I view 'simplification' as a descriptive term and not as a strategy of SLA, as suggested by Meisel (1983); cf. also Ellis (1985:171-172).



of the pidgin-like *Fremdarbeiteritalienisch*, such as the use of the invariable, unanalyzed unit *c'è* 'there is' with the value of a verb denoting possession:<sup>10</sup>

- 26) Io c'è un fratello (14: 58)  
"I there is a brother"
- 27) Yo c'è la ragazza en España (2: 275)  
"I there is the girlfriend in Spain"

It is possible, then, that in a different linguistic environment, where the Italian language fulfils a wider range of communicative functions and where more input from native speakers is available (e.g. in Italy), such phenomena would not occur. In this case, there would be strong evidence for Corder's (1978) claim that learners with a closely related mother tongue have a rather advanced starting point in second language acquisition, and that simplification processes will work differently by comparison with learners whose first language is typologically more distant.

Finally, applying the strategy of difference means that the learner has perceived exactly how far the strategies of congruence and correspondence take him; in this case 'difference' is a very successful learning strategy:

- 28) DIFF 2: The interlanguage contains elements and structures of L2 not shared by L1.

Learners use DIFF 2 from the very beginning, especially in the lexical domain, but only to a limited extent. During the learning process they rely on it more and more, thanks to a solid foundation of knowledge of the target language and the considerable amount of input they have already received. Often the strategy of difference comes into play only after other strategies have been tried without success; i.e., learners have to reformulate their hypothesis about a particular element of L2. In Andersen's (1983a) terms again, we could speak of 'denativization' in this case.

#### 4. Conclusion

Cross-linguistic influence is one of the most important issues in second language acquisition theory today, and more research is needed on this topic. Since the overall concept of 'transfer' is definitely too wide and too vague to answer the basic questions (what? how much? when? how? and why?), I have proposed three main learning strategies for cognate languages in order to analyze different types of underlying mental processes in interlanguage development. Obviously, this model is not sufficient to cope with all the aspects involved in second language learning; nevertheless it seems to me that this type of analysis allows some interesting generalizations.

There is empirical evidence that the degree of similarity or difference between the native and the target language more or less fixes the starting point in second language learning. In the case of closely related languages learners do not need to fall back on basilectal features, but will display linguistic structures with a more mesolectal character. Especially in the initial stages, learners rely to a great extent on their knowledge of their first language, which serves as a perceptual filter on the L2 input and as a guiding device (not only as a constraint) for hypothesis formation about the structure of the target language.

Similarity between native and target language is above all a facilitating factor in second language acquisition. What has been called 'negative transfer' is a real phenomenon in interlanguage, but often a necessary and transitional one; it can be explained by the communicative success provided by the learning strategy of congruence, and to some extent also by the greater naturalness of L1 structures.

#### References

- Andersen, R., ed. (1983), *Pidginization and Creolization as Language Acquisition*. Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House.
- Andersen, R. (1983a), "A Language Acquisition Interpretation of Pidginization and Creolization". In: Andersen, ed. (1983), 1-56.
- Banfi, E. & Cordin, P., eds. (1990), *Storia dell'italiano e forme dell'italianizzazione*. Roma: Bulzoni.
- Banfi, E. & Giacalone Ramat, A. (1990), "The acquisition of temporality. A Second Language Perspective", *Folia linguistica* 24, 405-428.
- Bernini, G. & Giacalone Ramat, A., eds. (1990), *La temporalità nell'acquisizione di lingue seconde*. Milano: Franco Angeli.
- Berretta, M., Molinelli, P. & Valentini, A., eds. (1990), *Parallela 4. Morfologia/Morphologie*. Tübingen: Narr.
- Berretta, M. (1990a), "Morfologia in italiano lingua seconda". In: Banfi/Cordin, eds. (1990), 181-201.
- Berretta, M. (1990b), "Il ruolo dell'infinito nel sistema verbale di apprendimento di italiano come L2". In: Bernini/Giacalone Ramat, eds. (1990), 51-80.
- Berruto, G. (1991), "*Fremdarbeiteritalienisch*: Fenomeni di pidginizzazione dell'italiano nella Svizzera tedesca", *Rivista di linguistica* 3.
- Berruto, G. (forthcoming), "Italiano in Europa oggi: *Foreigner Talk* nella Svizzera tedesca". In: *Omaggio a Gianfranco Folena*. Padova: Programma.
- Berruto, G., Moretti, B., Schmid, S. (1990), "Interlingue italiane nella Svizzera tedesca. Osservazioni generali e note sul sistema dell'articolo". In: Banfi/Cordin, eds. (1990), 203-228.
- Corder, S. (1978), "Language-Learner Language". In: Richards, ed. (1978), 71-93.
- Corder, S. (1983), "A Role for the Mother Tongue". In: Gass/Selinker, eds. (1983), 85-97.
- Ellis, R. (1985), *Understanding Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford University Press.

<sup>10</sup> According to Berruto (1991), this is one of the typical features of the Italian-based 'lingua franca' in Switzerland.



Ferguson C. & Slobin, D. eds. (1973), *Studies of Child Language Development*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Gass, S. & Selinker, L., eds. (1983), *Language Transfer in Language Learning*, Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House.

Giacalone Ramat, A. (1988), *L'italiano tra le altre lingue: strategie di acquisizione*, Bologna: il Mulino.

Hyman, L. (1975), *Phonology. Theory and Analysis*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Kellerman, E. (1977), "Towards a characterization of the strategy of transfer in second language learning", *Interlanguage Studies Bulletin* 2, Utrecht, 58-145.

Kellerman, E. & Sharwood Smith, M., eds. (1986), *Crosslinguistic Influence in Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.

Kielhöfer, B. & Börner, W. (1979), *Lernersprache Französisch. Psycholinguistische Analyse des Fremdsprachenwerwerbs*. Tübingen: Niemeyer.

Langacker, R. (1987), *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar*. Stanford University Press.

Larsen Freeman, D. & Long, M. (1991), *An Introduction to Second Language Acquisition Research*. London/New York: Longman.

Meisel, J. (1983), "Strategies of Second Language Acquisition. More than one kind of simplification". In: Andersen, ed. (1983), 120-157.

Moretti, B. (1990), "L'impiego effettivo della formazione delle parole nel discorso in italiano di non nativi (nella Svizzera tedesca)". In: Berretta/Molinelli/Valentini, eds. (1990), 293-303.

O'Malley, J., Chamot, A., Stewner Manzanares, G., Küpper, L. & Russo R., "Learning Strategies used by beginning and intermediate ESL students", *Language Learning* 35, 21-46.

Richards, J., ed. (1978), *Understanding Second and Foreign Language Learning. Issues and Perspectives*. Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House.

Ringbom, H. (1987), *The role of the first language in Foreign Language Learning*. Clevedon/Philadelphia: Multilingual Matters.

Rovere, G. (1974), "Aspetti sociolinguistici dell'emigrazione italiana", *Vox Romanica* 33, 99-144.

Rubin, J. (1975), "What the 'good language learner' can teach us", *TESOL quarterly* 9, 41-51.

Slobin, D. (1973), "Cognitive prerequisites for the development of grammar". In: Ferguson/Slobin, eds. (1973), 175-208.

Weinreich, U. (1953), *Languages in contact*. New York.

Havranek, Gertraud	General stages and individual variation in the development of the English verb system . . . . .	165
Grönholm, Maija	Aneignung des finnischen Verbalsystems durch schwedischsprachige Gesamtschüler (The acquisition of the Finnish verb system by Swedish-speaking comprehensive school students) . .	183
Housen, Alex	L2 acquisition of verb morphology - a case study . . .	195
Newby, David	Why dodos and ostriches don't lay fertile eggs: Input and intake in the acquisition of grammar . . . .	213
Schwaner, Iris Schaller	The case for notional grammar learning . . . . .	225

4. The Lexicon

Gerganov, Encho and Krassimira Rangelova	Effect of some motivational factors on foreign language vocabulary acquisition . .	243
Singleton, David	Modularity and lexical processing: An L2 perspective . . . . .	253
Sjöholm, Kaj	Patterns of transferability among fixed expressions in second language-acquisition . . . . .	263

5. Textlinguistics

Fujii, Seiko Y.	The use and learning of temporal clause-linkage in Japanese and English . . . . .	279
Viberg, Åke	The acquisition and development of Swedish as a first and as a second language: The case of clause combining and sentential connectors . . . . .	293
Verhoeven, Ludo	Acquisition of narrative skills in a bilingual context . . . . .	307